OPINION

BY F.S. AIJAZUDDIN

Head transplants

HEART transplants are a recent phenomenon. Stomach transplants have yet to be attempted. (Gluttons are counting the days.) Head transplants, however have been practised for millennia, especially when the head is crowned. For example, Alexander's vast empire was large enough — stretching from Greece to the Indus — to satisfy the covetous ambitions of his many generals. After Alexander's death, one of them — Ptolemy I Soter — ousted the earlier rulers of Egypt and founded the Ptolemaic dynasty which lasted 300 years.

The last Egyptian monarchy owes its propulsion to the British when, after relinquishing their mandate in 1922, they saw Fuad I installed as king of Egypt even though he was more Albanian, Circassian, and Turkish than Egyptian. Similarly, modern Greece imported its monarchs, first in 1830 from Bavaria when the Great Powers (Great Britain, France and Russia) installed King Otto. After his deposition in 1862, Prince George of Denmark was invited, elected, and enthroned with Allied support.

In time, King George I's grandson Philip married Princess Elizabeth. The night before their marriage in November 1947, Philip was granted British nationality and a dukedom. (The satirical magazine *Private Eye* always referred to him irreverently as 'Phil the Greek'). King Charles III, therefore, has Greek and Danish lineage from his father's side and German, Danish and French blood from his mother's side. The British royal family has more foreign blood than migrant dinghy dodgers.

Perhaps the most blatant transplants of monarchs occurred in the Levant when the British and later the Americans sought to retain their control over the viscous sands of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Jordan, and Iran. King Faisal bin Saud refused to loosen the kingdom's purse strings. He was disposed of when his US-educated nephew Prince Faisal bin Musaid assassinated him in March 1975.

Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi, thought he could ration his unstoppable wealth. The British thought otherwise. They engineered his removal in 1966 and replaced him with his younger brother Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan. A diplomat once asked the British Foreign Office why it did not just take over the Gulf states. The reply given was: "Why should we, when we can rule the rulers?"

In Iraq, the British midwifed a kingdom in the 1920s and supported the short-lived Hashemite dynasty that lasted three generations — Faisal I, Ghazi I and Faisal II. They could not prevent the uprising that overthrew and then murdered the young 23-year-old King Faisal II in July 1958. Unusually for an Arab ruler, Faisal had a talent for drawing and painting, honed perhaps during his education in Harrow Public School, England.

His cousin King Hussein of Jordan (also educated at Harrow) suffered the twin trauma of seeing his grandfather King Abdullah murdered and having to succeed prematurely his mentally ill father King Talal. Again unusually for an Arab ruler, Hussein ruled continuously, for 47 years. Perhaps his British education inclined him towards taking an English girl Toni Gardiner as his first wife. His mother Queen Zeyn objected. She relented only when Hussein agreed that no child of that marriage could succeed to the Jordanian throne. His younger brother Hassan bin Talal was declared crown prince. He remained so for 34 years and would have been king. However, Hussein, on his deathbed, under pressure from the US, declared his son Abdullah from Ms Gardiner to be his successor. As short as his father, Abdullah now struts on the international stage by the grace and favour of the White House.

> The latest pawn in Western hands is Reza Pahlavi.

The latest pawn in the hands of Western powers is the self-styled Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi. The dynasty to which he lays claim came into existence in 1925 when his grandfather Reza Khan (with British support) replaced the tottering Qajars. It is almost half a century since his father Reza Shah fled Iran and sought refuge in the US. Opposition even in the US proved too strong, exacerbated by the capture of the US embassy in Tehran by revolutionary guards. The last Shah — once hailed by president Jimmy Carter as "an island of stability" — was forced to seek asylum in Egypt.

During the recent conflict between Iran and Israel, Reza Pahlavi betook himself post haste to Tel Aviv where he offered himself as a candidate for the Persian throne. (His father had been a covert ally of Israel. His secret police Savak had been trained by Israel's Mossad.)

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not bite. He knew his Edmund Burke: "The difference between the real leader and the pretender is that the one sees into the future, while the other … acts upon expediency." The days of detachable monarchs have gone. America has replaced them with disposable allies. ■

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BY NOMAN AHMED

Shelterless & cold

PARTS of the country are in the grip of intense cold, with many northern locations posting sub-zero temperatures. Even Karachi, which generally experiences mild winters, at one point saw the mercury dropping to seven degrees Celsius — or even lower.

Winters in Pakistan affect daily life in many ways. The shortage and disruption in gas supply, the absence of alternative fuel for cooking and keeping warm, smog, travel dangers due to poor visibility, and the challenge of survival for the homeless are just some of the travails. Perhaps it is the plight of those without a roof over their heads that is the most poignant. Without resources of their own, their survival depends largely on access to temporary relief. Charities and individuals often provide food and clothing. Welfare-oriented healthcare outfits offer basic medical treatment when the homeless fall ill. But sustained living in the open poses a serious challenge.

At least nine per cent of Pakistan's total population suffers from inadequate housing. Many can be found dwelling on the streets. A study by this writer some years ago revealed that the homeless live in multiple formats in Karachi. They sleep, often with families or clans, on footpaths at night when there is less movement. But in winter, this becomes intolerable. Some burn junk to beat the cold.

Occasionally, people donate blankets and used bedding to the homeless. However, these are often stolen by those in a similar predicament. Spaces under flyovers and interchanges also become temporary dwellings. In winters, competition for these lots increases as they offer better protection against the cold.

Informal arrangements with law-enforcement personnel can mean a better chance of survival. Parks and playgrounds, especially rundown ones, are often preferred by the homeless, who strike a deal with local area watchmen to spend the night in relative peace.

The lucky ones might even find a corner to store their belongings, especially bedding. Many camp outside the entrances of shops, markets, and storage and commercial structures, which are usually well constructed, clean and have shades.

Often, the homeless may be acquainted with the watchmen, private security guards or shopkeepers, whereas new migrants utilise their social links, asking those belonging to the same village or settlement to help them access these public spaces, especially during cold spells. Low-paid labourers, too, may sleep outside shop entrances, with the consent of the owners and operating staff.

Most such spots are accessed by the homeless in Karachi's south, central, east and west districts.

Pushcart operators access partially shaded street locations and use their cart as night-time shelters, spreading their bedding on top of it. Usually, this option is exercised as a group activity with several vendors and their labourers sleeping on carts. This imparts a sense of collective security. In winter, they store additional blankets underneath the cart for safekeeping.

While green belts along the roads, areas surrounding *nullahs*, and junkyards are desired places for spending summer nights, the homeless move away from them in winter. Shrines, railway stations and bus terminals are relatively better options because they are partially covered, although some come to blows over benches and corners in these public spaces.

Law-enforcement personnel believe that the homeless can't be accommodated for extended periods. They fear that antisocial elements and aliens mix with the local homeless population to commit crimes. To them, profiling and data collection are the first step before initiating action. Charities and welfare set-ups are more caring and generally help without checking identities.

> Harsh winters are an emergency for those without homes.

Harsh winters are a climate emergency. From a policy and practice perspective, it should be dealt with as such by the relevant departments. Many lessons can be learned from international experience. Pavement dweller centres are multipurpose spaces developed in Dhaka to extend relief and assistance to the homeless. Drop-in centres are another common sight in many countries. Parks, public spaces, churches and other sacred places have exclusive service spaces extending temporary relief. In winters, special arrangements are made to provide warm makeshift spaces to those in need.

During the last government's tenure in Pakistan, *pannah gahs* were instituted with government and philanthropic contributions to help the needy and those without shelter. Warm clothes and bedding were provided at night at designated locations. Municipalities and other concerned authorities should consider extending such support to the homeless, especially during weather emergencies. ■

The writer is an academic and researcher based in Karachi.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Aid for Palestinians

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Pakistan is rushing relief material to Beirut by way of Damascus for the Palestinians affected by the current fighting in Lebanon, it was officially learnt today [Jan 21]. The relief consignment, comprising blood plasma, medicines and clothing, is being airlifted immediately in response to an urgent appeal by the chief of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Mr. Yasser Arafat, addressed to Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The Representative of the P.L.O in Islamabad, Mr. Ali Hujjaj, was called to the Foreign Office today and informed that [PM Bhutto] had approved the emergency despatch of relief goods… . — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported by news agencies from Washington,] the United States, worried by the reported entry of Syrian-based Palestinian troops in the Lebanese civil war, has warned all outside parties against interfering in the conflict. The White House has declined to identify the countries contacted … but they were understood to include Syria and Israel. An official said: "Our position has been made known to all concerned parties in the area. We oppose any interference from any quarter."

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

Condemning China

LAKE SUCCESS: The representatives of 12 Arab and Asian nations met again today [Jan 21] to consider ways of keeping the door open for further negotiations between the United Nations and the Chinese Communists. The 12 countries have told the United Nations Political Committee that they are not prepared at present to condemn China outright for aggression in Korea. The Committee will tomorrow continue its consideration of the American resolution asking the United Nations to brand China as an aggressor.

The British Cabinet was meeting in London tomorrow morning, and the five-hour time lag between Britain and the United States would allow a decision to reach Sir Gladwyn Jeb in time for the committee's meeting. Among the other Commonwealth nations it was understood that Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa would be prepared to support the American resolution. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported from Patna,] self-exiled King Tribhuvan of Nepal is likely to return to his Capital, Khatmandu soon, after the formation of an interim Government "including peoples representatives", Mr. C.P.N. Singh, Bharati Ambassador to Nepal indicated… .

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Of shattered dreams and KP destruction

WHILE the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) continues to focus on leading the political opposition at the national level, the province and its people have been left to suffer on all counts. Governance in KP has reached a point where it has become unbearable. Across healthcare, education, infrastructure, sanitation and public finance, the provincial government has failed to meet even the most basic of expectations.

Healthcare is among the clearest examples of misgovernance. Sadly, public hospitals, like the prestigious Lady Reading Hospital, paint a horrible picture and suffer from staff shortages, lack of medicines, broken equipment and weak oversight. Patients are routinely referred to private facilities because government hospitals cannot provide basic treatment.

In rural districts, primary healthcare centres often exist only on paper. The government's focus has remained on announcements rather than service delivery, leaving citizens to bear the cost of a collapsing public health system.

Public education presents a picture that is just as bleak, if not bleaker. Literacy rate in 2013, when the current ruling party took over the province, was 50 per cent, and it remains unchanged in 2026. Female literacy rate is 37pc, one of the lowest in Pakistan, while five million children in the province are out of school. Government schools across KP face teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and declining learning outcomes. Young students are forced to study in the open even in harsh weather conditions. Thousands of schools lack boundary walls, clean drinking water or functioning washrooms.

Teacher absenteeism remains widespread, while monitoring mechanisms appear weak or compromised. Even seven universities have now been closed in the province.

Rather than addressing structural problems, the provincial government has relied on cosmetic steps and slogans.

Infrastructure decay has become a defining feature of governance failure. Roads across urban and rural KP are damaged, poorly maintained, or dangerously constructed. In many areas, recent road projects have deteriorated within months, raising serious questions about quality control and corruption.

Bridges, drainage systems, and public buildings show similar signs of neglect. Urban centres, like Peshawar, struggle with traffic congestion and unsafe roads, while rural communities remain physically isolated due to neglected transport networks. Infrastructure spending, where it exists, has not translated into durable assets.

Sanitation and clean water services further illustrate the absence of effective planning. Many towns and villages lack proper waste disposal systems, leading to health hazards and environmental damage. Sewerage infrastructure is either outdated or non-existent, while municipal authorities lack capacity and funding.

Seasonal rains regularly expose these weaknesses, flooding streets and homes with contaminated water. The provincial government's response has been reactive and temporary, rather than based on long-term urban planning. There is rising spectre of drug trafficking and sale across the province that is ruining generations.

The provincial government's much-publicised Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Million Tree Tsunami schemes have also been undermined by serious allegations of corruption and mismanagement. There have been fake plantations, inflated figures and misuse of funds, raising doubts about the schemes' actual impact. At the same time, rampant deforestation continues across KP, driven by weak enforcement, illegal logging and political patronage.

Underlying these sectoral failures is a broader crisis of accountability. Corruption allegations, particularly in development projects and district-level spendings, have become routine. Scandals involving misappropriation of public funds have exposed weak financial controls and ineffective oversight institutions.

The provincial government often deflects responsibility by pointing to security challenges or strained relations with the federal government. While security concerns are real, they do not explain failures in terms of governance, planning and financial discipline. Punjab faces similar constraints, but has shown remarkable outcomes in key sectors. In KP, the problem is not merely lack of resources, but lack of priorities and political will.

Governance is ultimately judged by outcomes, not intentions or rhetoric. Without serious reforms in service delivery, transparency and institutional capacity, the province risks further decline. The government must be held accountable for making tall claims while failing to deliver.

Bacha Khan Afridi
Peshawar

Education in Sindh

HOW education affairs are being run in Sindh could be judged from my own experience at a government-run school. After transitioning from legal practice and with a passion for serving my community, I joined the Government Boys High School Ayoub Lakhan in Ghotki as a primary teacher in February 2023. The student body comprises children from mixed communities, largely from marginalised Hindu families and other underprivileged classes.

Upon assuming my duties, I observed the critical absence of Computer Science education. Having an MBA in Information Technology and a diploma in Computer Sciences, I volunteered to teach the subject to bridge this digital divide. This proposal was, however, declined by the headmaster. Subsequently, the district education officer during a visit gave a verbal assurance to support this initiative, but no formal order was ever issued.

In a significant development, officials from the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) visited the school and offered to establish a state-of-the-art computer laboratory at the school. Their only condition was that a competent and qualified teacher must be appointed. When I came to know of the offer, I wrote to the provincial education secretary, but have never received any response in the last couple of years.

Making things worse, a new crisis cropped up recently when all male primary school teachers, including myself, were transferred to a remote area marked by tribal tension. This has placed the teachers in a precarious situation, and has also left 168 enrolled students without a single primary school teacher, denying them their fundamental right to education.

The Sindh education authorities should review the transfer order to restore teaching for these vulnerable children and appoint a Computer Science teacher. The future of these children, who ask for nothing more than the education promised to them, now rests in the hands of those who are at the helm of education affairs.

Muhammad Ahmed
Ghotki

Mental health issues

RECENT tragedies at some universities in Lahore and Islamabad highlight a growing crisis of mental health and immense academic pressure within our higher education institutions. There is a complex interplay of financial difficulties, academic pressure, relationship problems, social isolation, and mental health issues.

Of greater concern is the flawed process of faculty induction, which has nurtured a deeply problematic academic environment where only a few teachers introduce updated texts and research to stimulate intellectual curiosity. Compounding this is a crisis of governance within campuses. The over-reliance on under-supervised visiting faculty, and rampant nepotism in hiring create a hostile learning atmosphere.

The toxic combination demoralises genuine students, and, by regressing the entire education system, jeopardises the future of an entire generation by valuing patronage and privilege over knowledge and integrity. Your global ranking is meaningless if your students are paying for it with their wellbeing and future.

Tufail Dawar
North Waziristan

Women doctors' woes

EVERYONE talks about the ethics, moral responsibility and duties of doctors, but few acknowledge their struggles, low wages and workplace politics. Moreover, women doctors often face workplace bias, favouritism based on appearance, sycophancy and nepotism. From senior doctors to patients, many hospital staff members overlook their hard work, judging them through rigid gender norms prevalent in society. Unfortunately, public hospitals are rife with such practices.

Furthermore, the safety and security of women doctors remain at a serious risk. Long duty hours, often 30-hour calls combined with 12-hour emergency shifts, night duties and mandatory hospital stays are imposed without adequate privacy or security. Even minor issues can prompt patient attendants to knock persistently, or at times enter women doctors' room without permission.

These unsafe working conditions highlight deep vulnerabilities within our healthcare system that demand immediate attention. Reforms must begin by addressing doctors' grievances and ensuring a fair remuneration based on the number and intensity of duty hours.

Dr Iqra Aman
Lahore

▶ **USELESS CAMPAIGN:** An anti-beggary campaign has been recently launched with a lot of hype by the Defence Housing Authority (DHA) in Karachi. However, there hardly seems to be any improvement on the roads. For example, at the intersection of Khayaban-i-Shujaat and Khayaban-i-Shahbaz in Phase V, a wheelchair-bound woman continues her normal course of business from morning till late in the night. I have lodged several complaints against this particular beggar in the last three years, but the DHA staff has failed to do anything. It seems that this anti-beggary campaign will not be successful in eliminating the powerful mafia of professional beggars, and will merely be a waste of taxpayers' money.
Aamir Malik
Karachi

▶ **GHOST INFRASTRUCTURE:** The Chowk Lashari village in Thul tehsil of Jacobabad district continues to suffer from severe administrative neglect. The most critical issue is the road connecting the village to Thul taluka. Due to its dilapidated condition, a journey now lasts three times of normal. This delay is life-threatening during medical emergencies. It appears that contractors may have listed this road as 'completed' in official records, while no work has actually been done. If so, this suggests a case of ghost infrastructure and misappropriation of development funds. The authorities should audit the development projects in the area.
Inamullah Lashari
Jacobabad

▶ **COSTLY FLIGHTS:** Flights from Quetta to Islamabad and from Quetta to Karachi are surprisingly very costly, even more than some international routes. With only two major airlines operating, the demand is high and flights are scarce. The bigger issue is the unsafe N-25 Highway, which mostly remains blocked by protests, making air travel the only option. Government officials and politicians hog seats, citing security concerns. The government should address these soaring prices. Tackling the root causes — more flights and fair access — would also help in this regard.
Zaid Baloch
Khuzdar

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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